

Improving English Skills through the Use of Narratives for Secondary School Pupils



Linguistics

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Abstract

Learning English has become a necessity for every citizen of Europe. The teaching of foreign languages is a challenging and demanding process for teachers. Teachers use a range of techniques for acquisitions of English as a foreign language. A technique which is viewed as very efficient is the use of narratives. This technique represents a holistic teaching and learning approach, based on the principle that pupils should interact with rich and authentic examples of the language. Stories are motivating, challenging and fun. So, learning English through stories is a natural way of learning the language. This study is based on a case study .2 classes of a secondary school were used to conduct this study. One of the classes was the experimental one, which was taught through stories once a week for a three month period. The results of the experimental class were compared with the results of the control class. Tests' results were analyzed by the statistics program SPSS. The aim of this study is to show the importance and the effectiveness of narration while teaching English and to suggest the inclusion of the English narrative class in the national curriculum.

1. Introduction

Teaching is a profession which leads pupils to their future and opens new gates to them. Being a teacher requires devotion, motivation not only for the profession, but also for the pupils being taught. Equipping pupils with the necessary knowledge is the most important thing along with finding ways of easing the process of learning and motivating them to love school and the subjects. The best way is to supply them with motivating and interesting materials which demolish the traditional and routine classroom. So why not use stories in English classes?

2. Narratives

The verb to narrate means to tell, to give all account of. Pupils enjoy listening to stories from their early childhood. The use of stories in our English classes encourages pupils' desire for further learning English. Stories can be also very helpful for pupils because they furnish them with a wide variety of language used in real and different situations. Through related learning activities pupils can practice and improve grammar, speaking, pronunciation, listening, vocabulary, reading and literary competences, communicative skills and critical thinking and imagination. “Stories are a useful tool in linking fantasy and the imagination with the child's real world. They provide a way of enabling children to make sense of their everyday life and forge links between home and school”. (Ellis and Brewster, 2002) Stories create magic and teach us about life, about ourselves and the others. The story is a unique way for students to develop, respect, understand and appreciate other cultures. According to Krashen, pupils can develop skills of a second language either by learning or acquiring them. Learning is regarded as a conscious process and students' attention is on the structure of the language while he believes that acquiring a foreign language is similar to that of learning our mother tongue. Acquiring occurs better through reading and listening to the authentic language. Stories offer this richness in authentic language.

3. Research Method

For the reasons mention above stories were used as a teaching strategy to motivate pupils to learn English as well as to improve their skills, reading, use of English and writing. The class, in which the stories were used as a teaching strategy, was the 9th class of the secondary school, “Sotir Becka”. The class was composed by 26 pupils .They had been learning English since the 3rd grade, but their level of English was poor, and most of them were reluctant to learn English. They were passive during class. The 9th class had English class three times a week. Thus, it was thought to use stories, once a week during the English class to make them be willingly active during

classes and help them acquire English. Stories were read once a week for a 3 month period, beginning from March till the end of May.

At the end of February an A2 level test was completed by the 9th grade pupils. At the same time the test was done by the 8th grade pupils. (It consisted of 22 pupils) The reason why even the 8th grade pupils did the test was to compare the result between those two classes at the end of the 3 month period. The 9th grade was the experimental class and the 8th grade the control class. The test consisted of three sections: reading section which had 20 points, use of English section which had 20 points and writing section which had 10 points (The assessment of the pupils concerning the writing task was done based on the: task completion 2 points, mechanics 2 points, grammar 2 points, and vocabulary 2 points, organization 2 points) So, the whole test had 50 points. After both classes did the test, it was checked by the teacher and they got grades.

9 stories were used by the teacher once a week from March till May. The titles of the stories used are as follows:

- 1) A tale with no name
- 2) The lizard and the damsel
- 3) The vain little mouse
- 4) Little red riding hood (a modern version)
- 5) The three feathers
- 6) Dear child
- 7) Hansel and Gretel
- 8) Never again
- 9) The selkie wife

Through these stories pupils reinforced different grammatical structures, enlarged their vocabulary got involved in various class activities, so as they could get the chance to use English. The activities used focused mainly on the communicative aspect of the language. Through stories exploitation pupils practiced all the four skills – speaking, writing reading even listening. Their reading comprehension improved, but what is most important is that their motivation to learn English increased. When asked questions about the stories, or while trying to retell the stories, they used the language productively. Those questions were asked by the pupils themselves to their classmates. In pairs they wrote dialogues discussing the stories or pretending to be one of the characters. An interesting activity for them was when they were asked to write the end of the story, after having read only half of it. Those stories encouraged them to participate during the English class because the atmosphere at class was not that of a normal class where pupils are under constant observation. They felt free to express their opinions, to ask each other questions about the stories, to retell or rewrite the stories.

During each of these classes all the pupils got engaged in classroom activities. Those stories helped the teacher to work with all the pupils, from the ones who had a low level of English to those who had a good level of English. The ones who had a low level of English were the ones who read the stories during classes. Those stories were read aloud by them in turns twice or even three times. Stories entertained them and at the same time taught them English. The role of the teacher was to manage the class and the activities she introduced. Pupils were the ones who had the control, and this gave them confidence.

4. Results

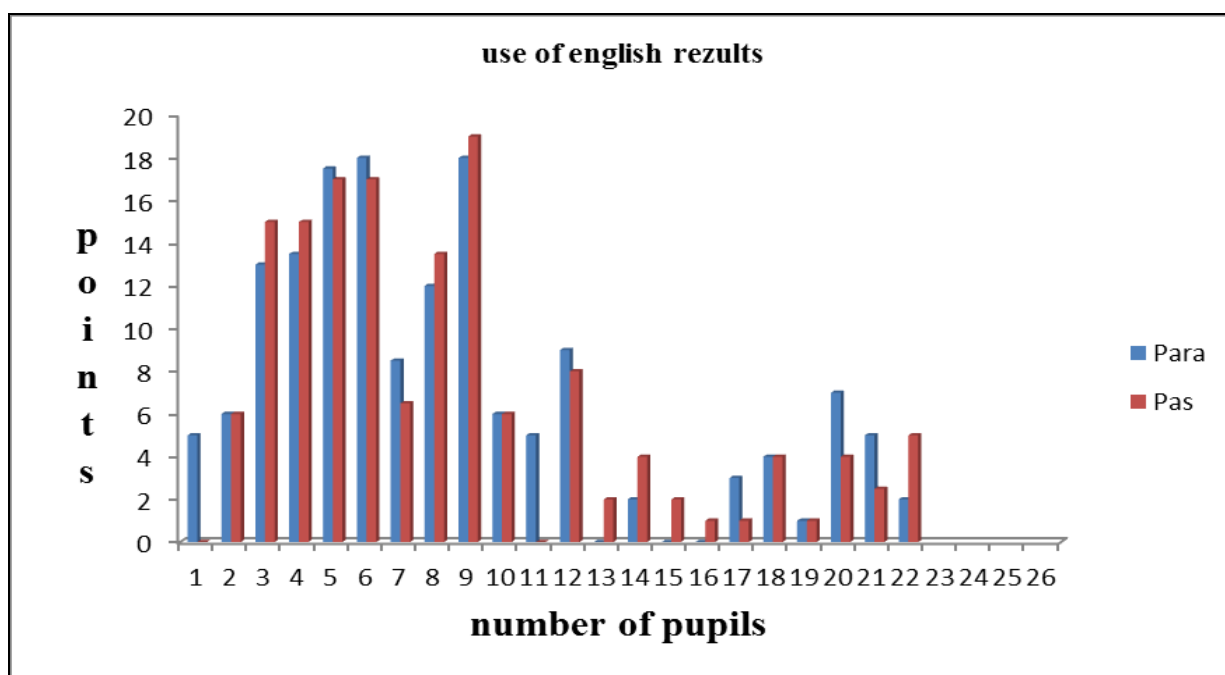
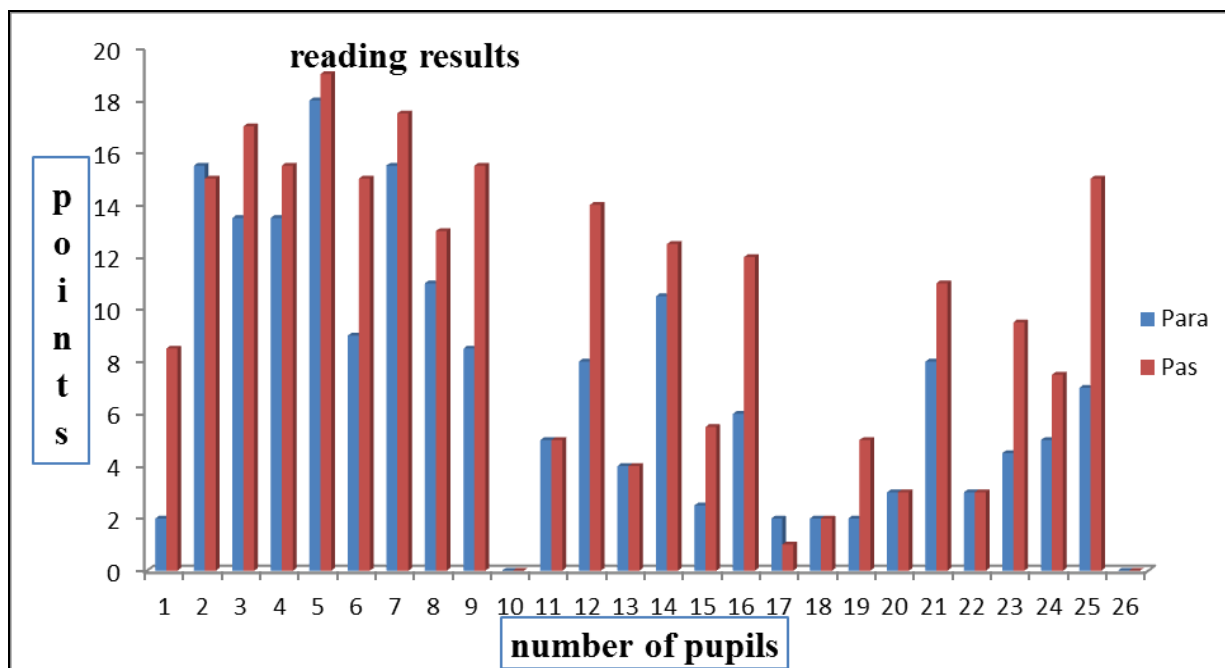
After the three month period both classes, the experimental class and the control class, sat another A-level test which was structured in the same way as the 1st one. The reading part had 20 points, each correct answer one point, the use of English part 20 point and writing 10 points. The whole test had 50 points.

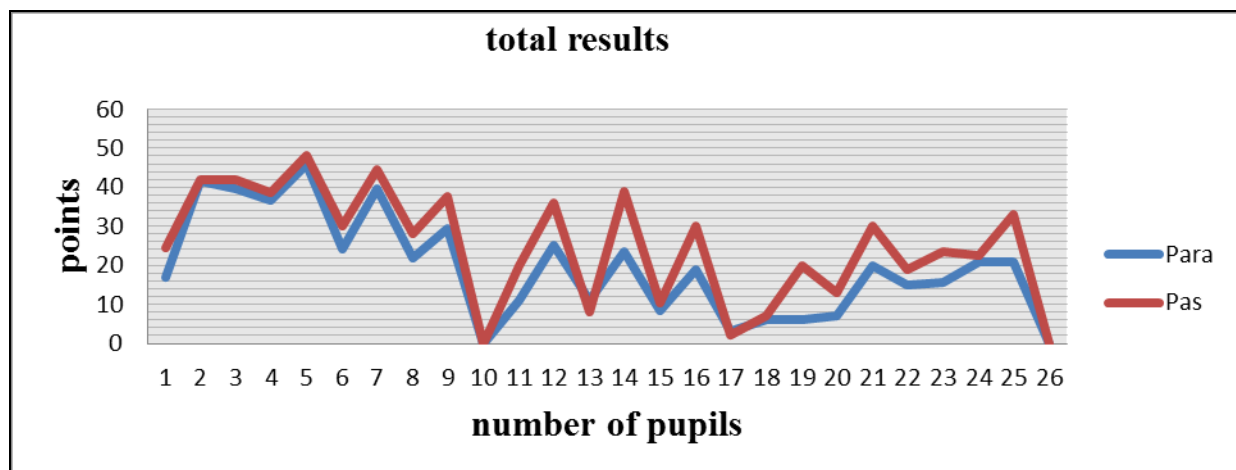
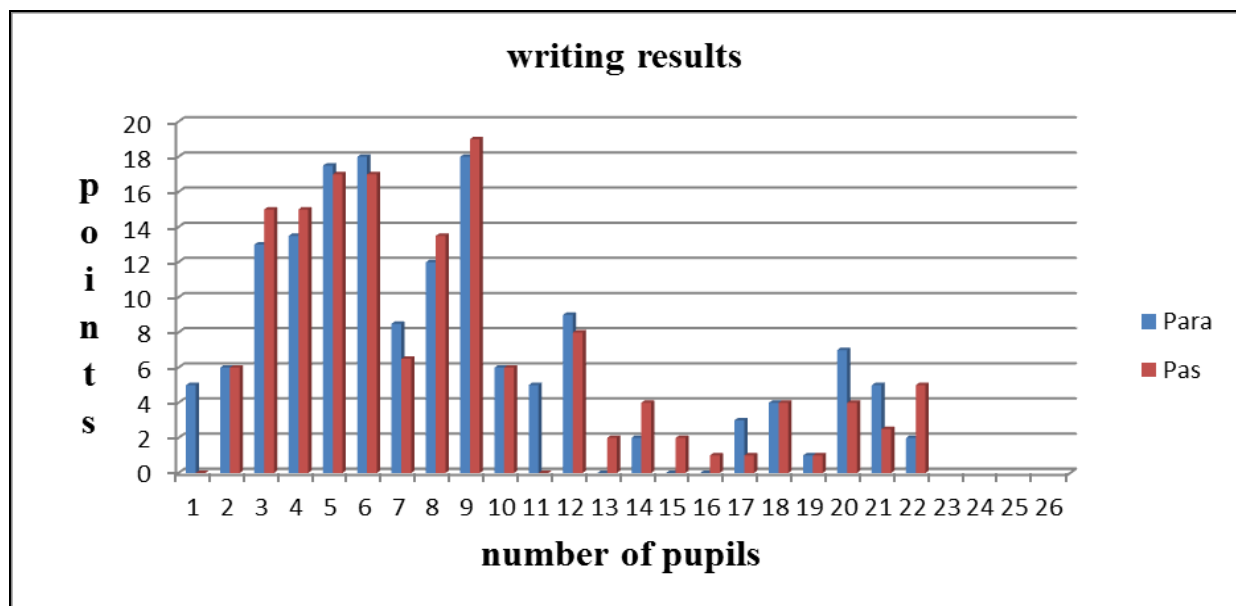
The tables below show the results of the both tests of each section of the test, concerning reading section, use of English section and writing section.

The first 4 tables present the results of the experimental class.

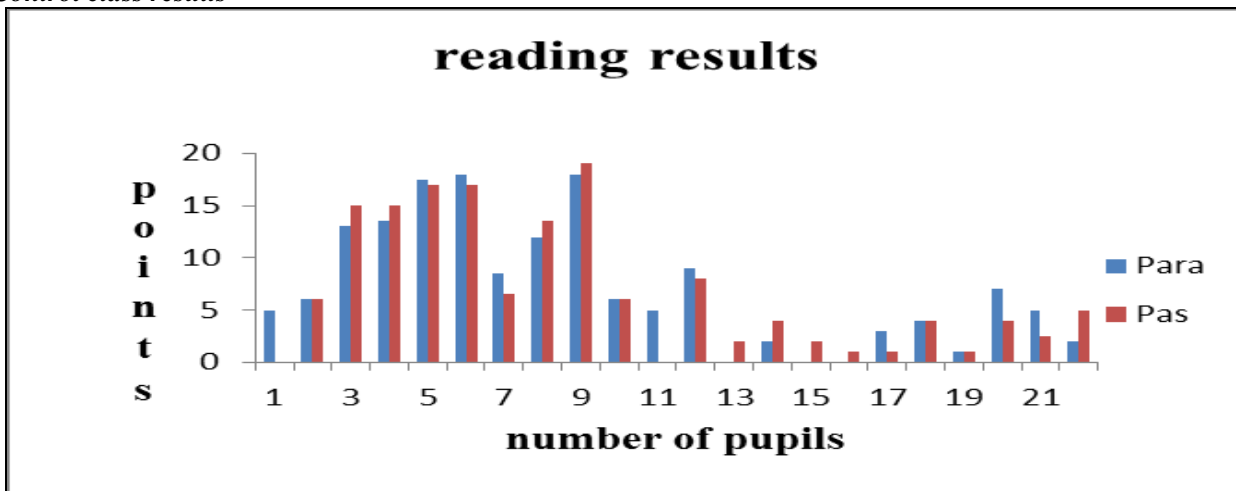
The blue color represents the results of the first test.

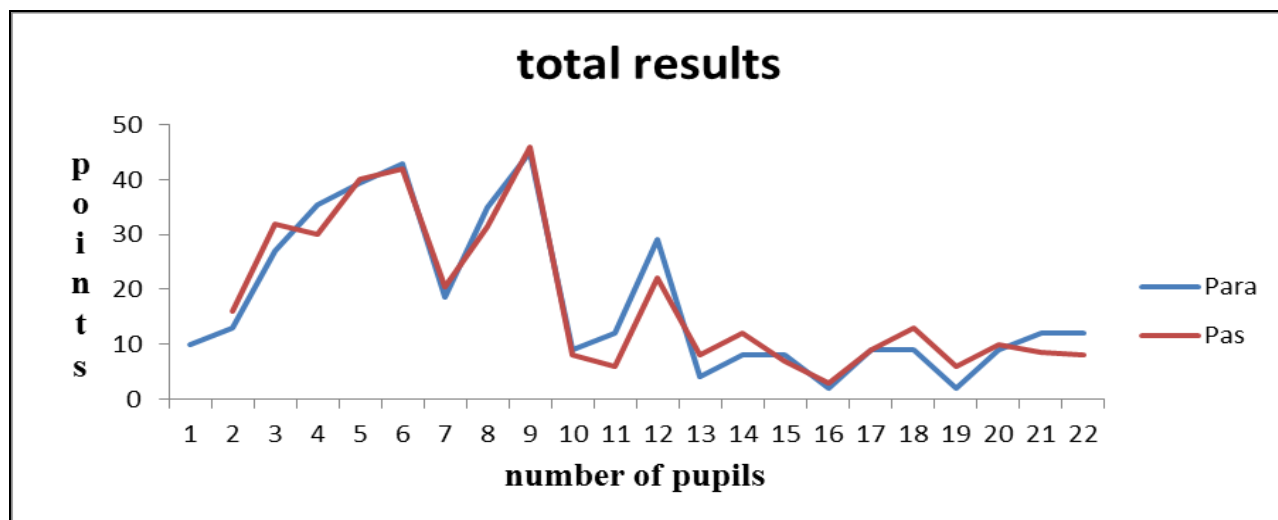
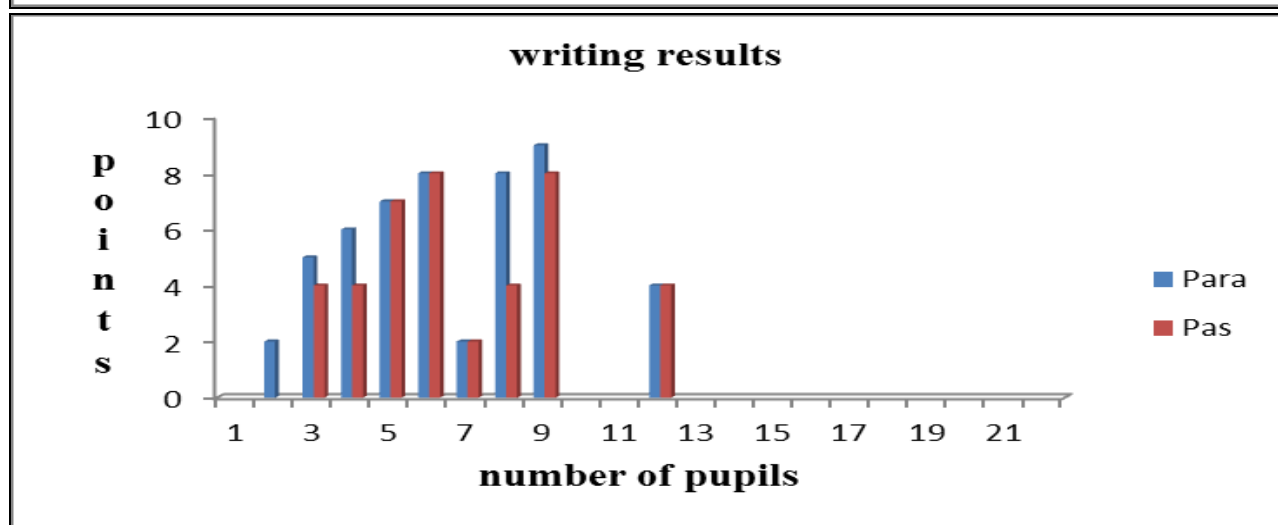
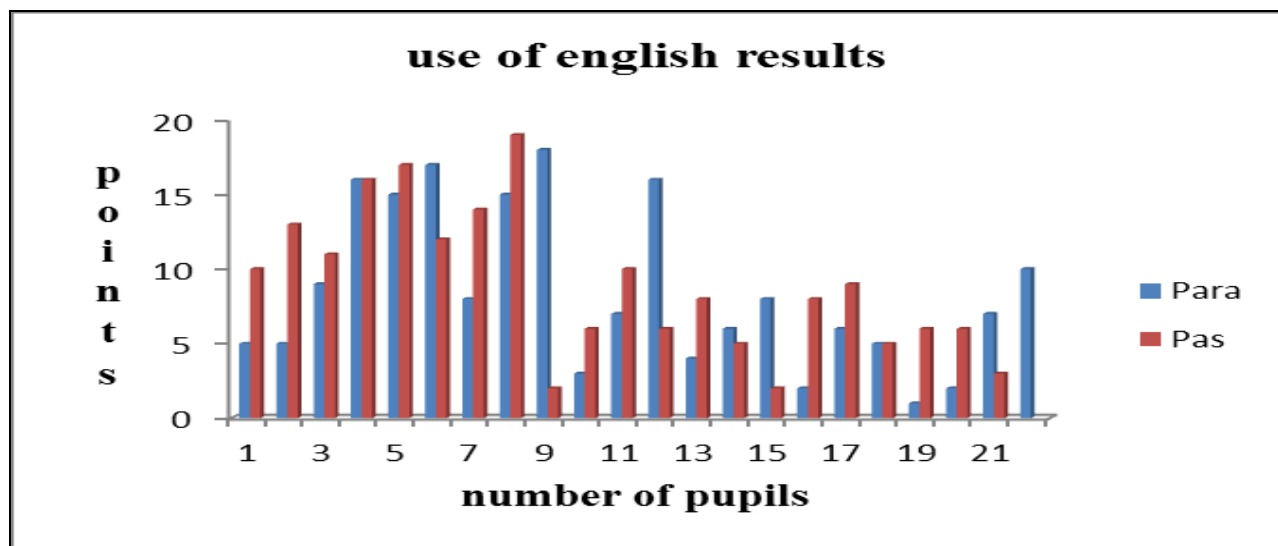
The red color represents the results of the second test.





Control class results





	Reading	use of English	Writing
Average results of experimental class	9.46	12.5	4.22
Average results of control class	7.11	9.95	5.12
Changing percentage	33%	26%	-18%

5. Conclusion

The test results, the pupils of the experimental class got in the 2nd test show that they did much better than the pupils of control class. Their improvement is really significant. Using stories in our English classes is a very useful technique for our pupils to improve their language performance. It is a motivating teaching strategy which we need the most nowadays to encourage pupils to learn and use English. Stories give us the chance to exploit them and be better teachers and teach our students in the best way possible. Stories enable pupils to gain confidence and learn English easily. Stories teach and entertain pupils at the same time. Our classroom is in need of real situations. Stories are the ones which make it possible for us to be teachers who teach.

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